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THE ENFORCEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL LABOR STANDARDS RELATING TO CHILD LABOR

W. H. SWIFT

Field Secretary, National Child Labor Committee

WE are at the end of a day's thinking. The whole discussion has been such as to force thought. I rise to leave with you one idea.

I very much hope that these labor planks will stand as a part of the treaty and that the whole treaty including the League of Nations will be adopted. I am sure that our people will approve its adoption. They are ready to try anything which promises peace and an opportunity to work out a better world-life. I say this in spite of the very able argument made by Mr. Pepper this morning. That was to my mind an argument so ably and so skillfully made that one is not apt to hear its like twice in a life-time. For the moment, it almost forced me to change my mind. But that has passed; I feel better now.

I am thinking of that part of the treaty which refers to the employment of children and am not thinking so much of the children of England, of France, of Italy or even of Belgium as of our own American boys and girls. It may be wrong, but I do think of our own first. The welfare of thousands, millions of American children will be promoted by the adoption of these standards by our national government. If adopted, the national government will undoubtedly take such steps as are necessary to insure that they are lived up to and to put them into active forceful operation in every section. We would be ashamed not to do it. Good manners and good morals would bind us to strict observance. America could not break the faith. If our Constitution should stand in the way, we would change it. It is only semi-sacred.

As the matter now stands we are so proud of the fact that we are Americans, that we have helped to save or to win liberty for others, that we forget our own shortcomings and limitations. The fact that the national government may have limitations seems to have been overlooked in the day's dis-

cussion. It is just that fact, the fact of limitations, which makes these international standards of vital importance to American children.

The fourteen-year age limit for employment and continuation schools up to eighteen have been referred to as if accepted and operating throughout our whole country. The fact is, that these standards are not accepted and enforced throughout our country. It is not at all certain that the Government of the United States can guarantee proper schooling for every child. The only serious attempt that has been made by the national government to this end has been to appropriate federal money for certain educational purposes and to fix the standards under which that money may be used. The federal government has taken no steps to guarantee that all the children are properly taught. Compulsory education is left to the different states. Coming in from the American field, where I have been traveling here and there, I tell you that there are thousands of American children who are not receiving proper schooling and who, although they will go to work at fourteen or younger and, in thousands of cases without even as much as a fifth-grade education, can not hope under state educational systems to see a continuation-school, much less attend it. All our children will not be properly taught unless the national government gives attention to the matter. Perhaps the adoption of these international standards would compel the national government to enter this field. If so, it would be highly beneficial.

The same thing is true with child labor. It was found that the employment of children could not be well regulated by state laws. Congress enacted a national child labor law. You know what happened. Certain citizens of North Carolina said, "The act is no good", snapped their fingers in the face of the national law, and the Supreme Court said, "The act is no good".

A second national child labor law was passed by Congress. Again citizens of North Carolina have said, "No good" and the lower Federal Court seems to have said, "You are right and Congress is wrong". So that it is not at all certain, as the law now is, that the national government can prevent even an inhuman exploitation of childhood, or enforce proper stand-

ards. In the state which I have named, children under sixteen years of age may be employed eleven hours a day and as late as nine o'clock at night.

As an American citizen, I do not doubt for one moment but that, if these international standards regulating the employment and education of children should be adopted, somehow, somebody, will devise some way by which we will not only live up to our international agreements but take care of our own boys and girls. The American people will not hesitate to amend the Constitution to that end if that is the only way.

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